

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A STERN CHASE.

A STORY IN THREE PARTS.

BY MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

THE THIRD PART.

CHAPTER X. THE DOWRY OF DOLORES.

THAT Don Norberto de Rodas was a person "bad to beat," all who had ever contested a point with him, or supported an interest opposed to his, could testify. His modes of manifesting that badness, were, however, as various as the occasions that provoked it, and different men would give different versions of his character under circumstances of antagonism to him. He could be violent and sudden when it suited his purpose; but he could as readily be temperate, smooth, and plausible. In all his dealings with Doña Mercedes he had adopted the gentle and conciliatory course: firstly, because he had never under-estimated the strength of her position as compared with his; and secondly, because he wisely recognised that, in relations so permanent as theirs, suavity was the only quality by which he could hope to replace regard and confidence. In the long past days, when Doña Mercedes was a young wife, with a possible rival in her beautiful stepdaughter, the kind of confederacy which Norberto had established between himself and her had been invaluable for his purposes, although it had failed to accomplish the chief of them, and he had never been so wanting in tact as to remind her of it since it had ceased to have an active existence. That confederacy had not been succeeded by intimacy when the death of Don Saturnino, and the mental condition of Doña Mercedes's son, made Norberto the inevitable as well as the natural protector of her interests. He did not forgive her for having neglected to

use her influence to procure a more liberal provision for him by Don Saturnino's will; and she remained entirely engrossed in the one object of her love and source of her grief. It was, therefore, as new as it was startling to them both to be again brought together by anything that lay beneath the surface of their respective lives.

The effect upon Doña Mercedes of the discovery which she had made at the Convent of Las Anunciadas was overwhelming. She had not crossed that threshold since her politic visit after the flight of Ines, and she had not now gone thither with any hope of gaining consolation, but only under the compulsion of her late-stirred remorse, and in the mood which tries to shift the pressure of pain, but does not hope to get rid of it.

Doña Mercedes convinced Sister Santa Gertrudis that she had been up to that moment ignorant of the existence of Ines's child, by the agitation which she betrayed on being questioned. The nun's astonishment was great; she had taken it for granted that the child had been brought up in England, and if she had sometimes thought it strange that a formal announcement of the death of Ines—sent by Don Norberto de Rodas—was the only communication which had been made to her, she had not resented the fact. The convent had unpleasant associations for the De Rodas family; it was not unnatural that they should drop the convent.

Her dreaded interview with Norberto over, Doña Mercedes set herself to reflect upon it calmly, and was thankful that it had passed so quietly. She was, of course, conscious of the strength of her own position with respect to him, but the old fear, which had lain dormant for so many years, revived when she had to stir the ashes of the past, and would not be laid.

She believed Norberto's statement so far as it went; but she suspected him—as it happened, wrongfully—of the suppression of a personal communication from Ines. She did not believe that the sole source of his information was the communication made on behalf of Miss Merivale by Mr. Ritchie. Her instinct told her that Ines would have made another effort for her child's sake, when death was drawing near to her; and she believed that Norberto had destroyed a letter written under those circumstances. She knew, however, that she would have to abide by what he had told her; for if he had indeed done this thing he would never acknowledge it.

The night was sultry, and Doña Mercedes could not sleep. Hour after hour she slowly paced the floor of the large, cool, moonlit room, and communed with her own strangely softened heart in the utter solitude made around her by time's changes.

What if she had loved Ines, and faithfully tried to replace the mother whom she had lost? Not for the first time was Doña Mercedes confronted by this question; but hitherto she had angrily put it from her. Now she hearkened to it, with all its pain and reproach, and with a great retrospective pity for Don Saturnino.

There are times in our moral life when hours do the work of years. This was such a time in the life of Doña Mercedes. The dawn broke in upon her sleepless vigil, and found her with remorse changed into repentance, and all her mind set on making reparation to the daughter of Ines, if happily she were living, for the injury done to one who had been so long beyond the reach of reparation.

Don Norberto was to bring to her the letter which had been written by Mr. Ritchie, thirteen years previously, together with a copy of his own. He had stated, falsely, that the appeal of Ines to her father, written at Southampton, had been destroyed, and he had, of course, made no mention of the threats to which he had resorted in his reply; so that Doña Mercedes was, like Lillas Merivale and Henry Rodney, without a clue to the mystery of the second marriage. Had she but known of those threats; had she been aware that the man whose nature she held, with reason, to be so implacable, had vowed a vendetta against Ines' child; she would probably have devised some other means of making the reparation upon which she was bent than that which came readily to her hand.

Norberto also had thought a good deal over the position, although he had not sacrificed an hour's sleep to it; and when he came to Doña Mercedes on the following day, bringing the promised documents, he was prepared for any course into which her contemptible superstition might drive her. Several courses were open to her, and he was but little concerned as to which of them she might adopt. The fabric of his tranquillity had been rudely shaken; the passion of a past time had been re-awakened; but his profound and cultivated dissimulation was ready for use in the emergency.

He showed Doña Mercedes at once that he meant to take the whole thing for granted, and to treat it in a business-like fashion.

"That is the correspondence," he said, handing her two papers, "and it sums up my knowledge on the subject. You will see that no material wrong to the child was done by my concealment of this communication—at the time for your good, as I think you will not dispute."

"I shall not dispute anything, Norberto. I blame you in nothing; you acted for the best. Myself I am free to blame, and I look to you to advise me, and to help me to make atonement."

"That is a matter of course," he answered, with a well-assumed air of relief. "When you have told me what it is you wish to do, I will give the best of my ability to the doing of it, even though it must be at the cost of admitting a serious mistake on my own part."

This unusual tone surprised Doña Mercedes. She was, however, too much relieved by it to listen to her suspicions.

"Thank you, Norberto," she said. "I will tell you all that is in my mind."

She glanced over the copy of his letter to Mr. Walter Ritchie, and observed how skilfully, by his statement that he wrote on behalf of Don Saturnino de Rodas, he had covered his responsibility; but she laid down the paper without allowing him to see that she had perceived this.

"When we have ascertained where the daughter of Ines is—for our purposes we take it for granted that she is living—and in what position, I should like to propose that she should come out to reside with me for as long a period as her English relations would permit, in order that she may become acquainted with her mother's country, and with what may be her own future home, if she likes to make it so."

"Do you bear in mind that she will be

quite English in her education and ideas, and that you have never fallen into the way of liking the English?"

"I don't forget that; but I do not hesitate, nevertheless. If you have no greater objection to make, we may pass over this one."

"Very well," said Norberto, in cheerful assent; "then the ground is cleared. You will write the invitation to my uncle's unknown granddaughter, and I shall enclose it in my explanation to this Señor Ritchie or his representatives; then we shall see what will happen. I can only say that I hope everything may turn out according to your wishes."

"If she comes to me," said Doña Mercedes nervously, and with an involuntarily wistful look at Norberto, "I hope I may be able to make her happy."

Don Norberto repressed the sardonic smile of retrospective meaning that hovered about his thin lips, and answered gravely:

"To will, with you, has always been to succeed."

On the following day, that of the dispatch of the mail to England, Don Norberto brought the draft of his letter to Doña Mercedes. She approved of it and gave him her own letter, which was in French and addressed to Miss Merivale, to read.

This letter was feelingly and most courteously composed, and Don Norberto read it with as much wonder as anger; but he expressed his approval in terms as well-chosen as its own. It would have taken a keen observer indeed to discern in his even phrases the deadly wrath of a man beaten in his dearest hopes, and defeated in his steadiest and worst purpose, for the second time—after a lapse of years sufficient in any ordinary case to subdue the strongest of passions, and to efface the keenest of memories.

From that day forth Doña Mercedes began to resume her former interest in her surroundings; she was rehearsing for the time when the daughter of Ines would be with her; she was filling her life with purposes in order that phantoms might find no place there. She placed the girl's figure in the large, bare, vacant rooms. She disposed their scanty furniture in imagination for Ines's child as she had never done for Ines herself; she even pictured to herself a return to the world and its ways, for the sake of the girl to whom this foreign home would be so new, and might be made so pleasant. She did not forget her grief, nor did she

imagine that the vacant places in her heart could ever be filled, but the bitterness was assuaged. She had asked Miss Merivale to send her a photograph of Miss Rosslyn, and she began to be impatient for the answer to her letter long before it could arrive. Would the girl be like Ines? Doña Mercedes hoped at first she might not prove so, but as the agitation of her discovery wore off by degrees, she blamed herself for this, as a shrinking from a just part of her penance; and she had the covering removed from the portrait of Ines's mother, which might have been that of Ines herself, and would sit before it for hours, busy with her embroidery and her thoughts.

When in due time Don Norberto de Rodas received Mr. Walter Ritchie's answer to his communication, it occasioned him a good deal of thought. One immediate result of the perusal of his reflections was his searching for some papers relating to a large transaction with a certain Spanish house of business, and taking them with him when he went to see Doña Mercedes.

"The mail is in," he said, "and the letters we have been expecting have arrived. Here is one for you."

She took it eagerly, but her eyes did not leave his face.

"The Señor Ritchie tells me strange news, and in a brief way. The girl is living, is still with her father's sister, but is to be married very shortly, with the approbation of all her friends, including that man who, as you may remember, brought the other to your house, and whom I always suspected of having a share in what happened."

"In the flight of Ines?"

Don Norberto nodded. He never uttered her name or Hugh's.

"Yes—Rodney. You remember him?"

"Perfectly."

"I had heard that he was dead, and I repeated the statement to the agent. This Señor Rodney has appeared in London among these friends of the other Englishman, and was intending to come to Cuba and tell us all the news that we have learned without his troubling himself so much, when our letters arrived and spared him the voyage. You had better read Miss Merivale's letter; I am referred to it for further information."

Doña Mercedes, with her fear of him revived by the tone of his voice, which revealed that he was struggling with some feeling too strong for him for the moment,

obeyed him. Miss Merivale wrote in French, most graciously, and with an expression as frank as it was dignified, of her gratification at the nature of Doña Mercedes' communication, and then she entered into the particulars of Dolores' position at the moment. The marriage was to take place in six weeks from the date of Miss Merivale's letter, and not only was a photograph of Dolores enclosed, as requested, but one of Julian Courtland was also sent. The feelings with which Dolores had heard of the recognition of her by the survivors of her mother's family were gracefully conveyed, and due acknowledgment was made of the generous intentions towards her, intimated by Doña Mercedes in addition to her statement of the sum to which Dolores was entitled in right of her mother. Then came a passage that quelled the tumult of disappointment and regret with which Doña Mercedes had read all the foregoing portion, with its announcement of the subversion of her plans, and the defeat of her hopes. What might not Dolores have been to her? She was to be nothing to her now. There was to be no chance for her, no new spring of hope and consolation for her, nothing but the poor, bare reparation of money! But Miss Merivale went on to propose that the visit which Doña Mercedes had invited Dolores to make to her should still take place, the bride and bridegroom extending their tour to the "Pearl of the Antilles."

Doña Mercedes read the letter aloud, and Norberto de Rodas listened to its contents and her comments without a word.

"Dolores!" she said. "A name Ines liked, as I remember; but I wonder she did not give the child her mother's name, Modesta. And this is she. A lovely creature; very like Ines, and without the least look of her father, whom I remember perfectly. See."

Doña Mercedes held out the photograph to Norberto, but he put it aside, and said roughly:

"I am no judge of likenesses."

She looked up at him; his face wore a fierce look which she had not seen there for years.

"Can it be possible," she thought, "that jealousy and resentment are living in him still?"

She replaced the two cards in the envelope, taking no notice of his rude speech, and simply asked him what he thought of Miss Merivale's letter.

Don Norberto thought well of it on the

whole. He could have wished for the sake of Doña Mercedes that the girl had come out to her free, so that she might have remained in Cuba had she wished to do so; but, as this could not be, Miss Merivale's proposal was the next best thing. He supposed there would not be any likelihood of this Señor Courtland—another barbarous English name—wishing to settle at Santiago. Miss Merivale had said nothing of his profession, and it might be that he could do so. Don Norberto said this so carelessly that he threw Doña Mercedes off her guard, and she answered:

"If they are both what we like, there could be no such good way of building up the old house again."

"Precisely my meaning," said he, with an approving nod. Then they talked over the letters, and the mode in which a quick reply might be sent, so as to reach Dolores before her wedding, and Don Norberto had completely removed the impression which his momentary failure in self-control had produced, before he asked the permission of Doña Mercedes to turn aside for a while to the discussion of a pressing matter of business. He then produced the papers he had brought with him, and having explained the matter to which they referred with his customary lucidity, effectually recalled the wandering attention of Doña Mercedes by informing her that he considered it absolutely necessary for him to go to Spain in order to secure certain jeopardised interests. He had been arriving at this conclusion for some time past, but had not liked to trouble her on the subject until after her mind had been set at rest by the arrival of letters from England, and now he felt no time must be lost. He regretted the necessity, but was quite satisfied that it existed.

Don Norberto's explanation was plausible, and Doña Mercedes had nothing to do except agree to his proposal.

"Of course I also regret the necessity very much," she said, "especially as you will be away when Dolores and her husband arrive, if you start immediately, and they make their visit here shortly after their marriage. This will be a most unfortunate occurrence."

Don Norberto smiled in the most frank and amiable way as he replied:

"There is no help for my being away when they arrive, but as I do not entertain any doubt of your persuading them to remain as long as you wish to detain them, that will not matter so very much after all.

I shall make no delay, but will start for home the very hour my business is done."

Don Norberto's preparations were made expeditiously, and he took his departure by the next outgoing mail. At his last conference with Doña Mercedes, she consulted him upon the subject of the dowry of Dolores, as to what sum she ought to add to the original inheritance of Ines, and the most convenient manner of arranging the affair. Never had she found Don Norberto so agreeable, so ready, so liberal-minded; for he was usually much averse to witnessing the expenditure even of other people's money. The interesting nature of the strange circumstances seemed, however, to have completely transformed him; his vicarious stinginess and his habitual tendency to undervalue all claims which had to be recognised in money, forsook him for the nonce. He entered into the matter in the most liberal spirit, only proposing to Doña Mercedes that she should wait until she had had an opportunity of forming a serious estimate of the character of the young Englishman with the barbarous name, before she handed over money to his keeping. He reminded her that her offer had been made to Dolores only, and could not have been taken into consideration with regard to the marriage. In a word he said: "Give lavishly, but do not be in a hurry about it," and she recognised the soundness of his counsel.

Thus it happened that when Don Norberto came to take leave of Doña Mercedes, he found her in a very pleasant frame of mind respecting him, and they parted with a display of greater cordiality than had existed between them from the time of Don Saturnino's death.

Great was the delight and the excitement of Dolores, when she was made acquainted with the new events in her own history. The story was told to her by Liliás, under the instruction of Rodney, in such a way as to convey the smallest possible amount of condemnation of her mother's relatives, and she was too young and too little versed in the ways of the world to suspect that anything was kept back from her, or to put questions respecting the far past either to her informants or to herself. The prospect of distant travel with Julian, with such a goal in view as her mother's old home and the welcome of her mother's people, was enchanting to

her imagination and her feelings, and she was never tired of discussing it with her great friend and ally, Henry Rodney. For that much-travelled gentleman Dolores entertained ardent admiration. He knew everything, and he had forgotten nothing. How vivid were the pictures which he drew for her of her mother's country, its physical features, its people and their manners and customs! His memory was so vivid and minute that he could describe the house in which her mother had lived as though he had seen it quite recently, and he had endless anecdotes to tell her of his brief companionship with Hugh Rosslyn. That he had known the father whom she had never seen, and of whom, strange to say, her mother had never spoken to her—she was certain of that, and persisted in the assertion—was Rodney's great charm for Dolores. There was a portrait of Hugh by no means remarkable as a work of art, which he had painted for Liliás in very early days, and Dolores had been most anxious to know whether his friend thought it so good a likeness as Aunt Liliás did. The portrait was very like Hugh Rosslyn, and gave one of his best looks. Then Dolores wanted Rodney's opinion as to whether she resembled her father at all, and was so much disappointed when he represented to her that it was impossible she could do so, being the living image of her mother, that he reconsidered his judgment and thought he detected a likeness in the expression. Dolores reported this to Liliás in triumph, and Liliás, who justified Mr. Wyndham's foreboding of her amenability to Rodney's influence, was very soon able to recognise the "look" which had never struck her previously.

It was arranged that the young couple were to sail for the West Indies in the last week of their honeymoon, and great was the effect of this decision upon the important matter of Dolores's wedding-clothes. Rodney knew all about what she ought to take, and what she must leave at home, and was, in fact, simply invaluable. In truth he was deeply interested in the girl, sincerely fond of her, and involuntarily, unreasonably, instinctively, sorry for her. He was careful to check himself upon the latter point, for he did not know any fact to the disadvantage to Julian Courtland, and he could not have said anything positive except that he had not taken to Julian, and Julian had not taken to him.

It was strange, but true, that if there

was a drawback which Dolores would have admitted, to the happiness of the weeks which preceded her marriage, it existed in Julian himself. She wondered why it was that she did not feel so much at her ease with him as before she was blest with the knowledge that he loved her with lover's love, and why she sometimes failed to please him now, even in those very things which had formerly pleased him most. But when she ventured to put these timid girlish doubts before him, he would always turn them off by protesting that he was out of humour with the fuss, the preparations, the delay, the people about them, and that when they two should have left all this worry behind, he should be perfectly happy. Now Dolores, a simple, happy, healthy-minded girl, liked all the things which he included in the opprobrious term "worry," and was sometimes not quite sorry when "business" detained Julian in London. She dwelt with delight upon his assurances that all he wanted was her uninterrupted society, and she devoured and treasured his little notes of excuse, which he turned very prettily.

Money matters were arranged satisfactorily for Julian, or rather for Mr. Wyndham, although as that astute person had foreseen, Mr. Rodney was consulted. Julian might confidently look forward to paying Mr. Wyndham off, and getting finally rid of him, as soon after the marriage as he could with propriety devote himself to affairs of so prosaic a kind. An arrangement was made between the two that they were to meet at Paris, where Julian and Dolores were to pass a few days on their way back to England, other business taking Mr. Wyndham thither at the same time.

Julian regarded the prospect of the trip to Cuba with favour. He wanted to get right away. He told himself constantly that he should be all right when he was in a new scene and among totally new people; that a man can always forget things if he chooses, and that he (Julian) did choose. Also, that he meant to behave well to Dolores, whom he really liked until he had to think of her as his wife, instead of Margaret whom he really loved; and that she was such a fool and so absurdly in love with him that she would never know the difference between the sham and the true, and being a thoroughly good girl, would not be too tiresome when she got over her romance. After all, it was worth anything to be free, and then, he could not have helped it. To that point

all his attempts at consoling himself came back. He had, however, one source of pure, unalloyed pleasure; it was Mr. Wyndham's ignorance of the Cuba affair. Had this man known that Dolores was doubly an heiress, he might have put the screw on Julian much more tightly; as it was, he would be paid, dismissed, and done with, and his victim would be speeding towards a second fortune, with no lien upon it, not one shilling of which should ever find its way into Mr. Wyndham's pocket. And the beauty of the thing was that the money he should never touch, never hear of, was money that he might have enjoyed, that had actually been his wife's by right. The malicious pleasure with which Julian contemplated this instance of the irony of fate, constantly reminding himself of it when he was with its unconscious subject was, in fact, the chief alleviation of this period of his existence.

Mr. Wyndham was, indeed, unaware of the Cuban incident; so far Julian was well entitled to the enjoyment of his joke; but he was fully cognisant of his friend's intention of getting rid of him altogether by the approaching money settlement between them. Now, Mr. Wyndham greatly liked the looks of Miss Rosslyn, and whenever he saw that Julian's intention was particularly present to Julian's mind, he would repeat to himself:

"She and I will be very good friends some day."

So time went on, and the wedding-day of Julian Courtland and Dolores Rosslyn arrived.

CHRONICLES OF SCOTTISH COUNTIES.

THE BORDER COUNTIES.

WHEN we cross the Borders to Scotland, it will be preferably by the Ladykirk ford, within sight of

Norham's castled steep
And Tweed's fair river broad and deep
And Cheviot's mountains lone;

for here we are at once among the most stirring reminiscences of the old Border region. By this ford, what armies have crossed in olden time, what trains of knights and men-at-arms, what bands of rude Border prickers, and of yet wilder warriors from the Highlands! all eager to share in the spoil of the English land. At Holiwell Haugh, close by, the English King met the Scottish nobility at a famous conference, which was to settle the claims of Bruce and Baliol to the crown—the be-

ginning of a series of mutual wrongs and injuries that estranged the two kingdoms, which had hitherto had but little ill-blood between them.

There was always peril in crossing the broad bed of the Tweed, a river sudden in its floods and capricious in its moods. James the Fourth was nearly drowned one day in crossing, and vowed in his peril a chapel to Our Lady should he escape. The chapel was duly built, and gave its name to the ford; but no power could stay the doomed King from that last fatal crossing, when he led his chivalry

Of gallant Gordons many a one,
And many a stubborn Highlandman,
And many a rugged Border clan,

to the fatal field of Flodden.

Once over the Tweed and we are in the county of Berwick, and in the fertile district of the Merse. When Marmion took the same journey

The Merse forayers were abroad.

But there is no danger of that kind now, as the Merse is one of the richest and best settled districts of Scotland. "Marche and Tevidale are the best mixt and most plentiful shires for grass and corn, for fleshes and bread, in all our lands." It was thus of old, even when Border feuds and raids sometimes spread desolation around; but now, after centuries of peace and prosperity, the district has become known as the garden of Scotland—a garden hedged about with bleak mountain ranges, but everywhere green and luxuriant with hedgerows and stately trees; with charming cottages half hidden in the foliage; with solid farm-houses that rise almost to the dignity of mansions, surrounded by handsome farm-buildings and well-filled stackyards.

Beyond is the moorland region of Lammermuir, with here and there a rough Border peel or tower crumbling to decay among the heather: a district of wide sheep farms, whose sturdy, hospitable farmers are built of a mould more grand and liberal than elsewhere.

In following the Scottish side of the Tweed upwards, Coldstream is the chief town we come to, a thriving place once, as much resorted to as Gretna Green by runaway couples eager to be married. There was no blacksmith, indeed, at Coldstream who set himself up as competent to forge the bonds of wedlock, but the innkeepers undertook the business, and did a thriving trade in consequence, till an alteration in

the English marriage laws put an end to the traffic over the Borders. Coldstream has also a familiar sound to English ears dating from the time when General Monk lay here in 1659-60, waiting events and raising that regiment of his, hereafter to be known as the Coldstream Guards.

Half-a-dozen miles above Coldstream the Tweed becomes entirely a Scottish river, and the Border line turns abruptly southward, marked by the gently swelling ranges of the Cheviot Hills.

The county town of Berwickshire is Greenlaw, a place in nowise remarkable, but the place of most importance is Dunse, as testified by the old saying, "Dunse dings a'." But whatever fame may attach to Dunse as the birthplace of the famous medieval scholar, Dunus Scotus, belongs more properly to the old town which was pulled down a good while ago, and whose site is now within the grounds of the modern castle of Dunse. The chief feature of the place is the green, round-topped hill of Dunse, or Dunse-law, the view from which is well described in one of the best of Wilson's "Border Tales." "Ye have the whole Merse lying beneath your feet like a beautifully laid out and glorious garden, the garden o' some mighty conqueror that had converted a province into a pleasure ground, and walled it round wi' mountains. There ye behold the Blackadder wimpling along, the Whiteadder curling round below you, and as far as ye can see, now glittering in a haugh or buried amongst wooded braes. Before ye are the Cheviots, wi' a broad country, the very sister of the Merse lying below them, and the Tweed shining out here and there like a lake. To the right ye behold Roxburghshire in the dimness o' distance, wi' the smoke of towns, villages, and hamlets rising in mid-air. On each elbow ye have the purple Lammermuir, where a hundred hirsels graze, and to the east the mighty ocean and the ships wi' white sails spread to the sun," or as the Border poet sings, the author of the "Day Estival":

The herds beneath some leafy tree
Amid the flowers they lie,
The stable ships upon the sea
Tends up their sails to dry.

With all its tranquil beauty the scene has often been filled with the smoke clouds of war, and the passage of marching legions, as well as fierce and random broils of Border warfare. An incident of this latter class was the slaughter of the gallant

and accomplished French nobleman, de la Bastie, known among the Borders as Tilliebatie, who had been appointed by the Regent Albany, in the years of confusion and disorder which followed the fatal field of Flodden, Warden of the Eastern Marches. The office of Warden was claimed as a right by the powerful family of the Lords Home; but the chief of the house had recently been executed by order of the Regent, and the Homes resolved at once to assert their right, and avenge the death of their kinsman at the cost of the intruding Frenchman.

Some Border fray about the old tower of Langton—no longer in existence, but a noted place of arms in the Border wars—brought the active and zealous young Warden upon the scene to regulate matters. The whole matter was arranged, it is thought, as a snare for the Warden's destruction, and no sooner did he appear at the head of a small following, than he was surrounded by swarms of Borderers. Tilliebatie rode for his life, hoping to reach Dunbar, the nearest point of safety, but, becoming entangled in a swamp still called Batie's Bog, he was surrounded by pursuers and killed, when David, the fierce laird of Wedderburn, cut off his head, and hanging it by its long silken locks to his saddle-bow, rode home in barbarous triumph.

A century later, and the whole condition of things had undergone a complete change. The union of the crowns of England and Scotland had abolished the *raison d'être* of Border warfare. The wild Border chieftains had become prosperous and wealthy landlords. The rude prickings of a former day, full of wild superstitions, and who had clung to the old faith when elsewhere all the altars had been overthrown, were succeeded by a race of staunch Presbyterians, ready no longer to lay down their lives for Douglas or Gordon, for Home or Graham, but for Holy Writ and the solemn League and Covenant.

Scotch and English were once more arrayed against each other when Alexander Lesley encamped on the hill of Dunse with twenty-two thousand foot and five hundred horse, while he watched the movements of his royal master, who was posted on the English side of the Tweed. The hill was garnished at the top with mounted cannon, the soldiers lay encamped around in wooden huts thatched with straw, while the officers, among whom were many of the chief nobles of Scotland, were accommodated with more spacious canvas booths. Ministers, too,

were there in numbers, to keep alive the embers of hostility; and psalms and hymns in rugged harmony were heard around the hill of Dunse. The bold front shown by the Scotch made the King recoil from his project of re-establishing Episcopacy by force of arms.

Of some fame, too, in the annals of the Merse is Polwarth, with its famous green, where once stood the old thorn round which all newly-married couples must dance three times, and which the lads and lasses danced about *ad libitum*.

At Polwarth on the green,
If you'll meet me on the morn
Where lanes do convene
To dance around the thorn.

Tradition ascribes the origin of the dance around the thorn to the romance of the Sinclair girls, heiresses of Polwarth, who loved their neighbour lads the Homes of Wedderburn. A cruel uncle intervened, and shut up the girls in a tower in the Lothians, but they contrived to let their lovers know of their plight, and the Homes, raising the men of the Merse, stormed the tower, and brought away their brides in triumph, when the nuptials were celebrated in a wild dance round the thorn. This recital shows that even at the uncertain date of the story the dance round the thorn was considered an essential and valid part of the marriage celebration.

Whether the dancers brought the musicians, or vice versa, it will be difficult to settle, but it is certain that Polwarth was noted for its fiddlers—the last minstrels of the district, whose descendants in foreign climes may still perhaps half knowingly repeat the old lilt of Polwarth on the Green. Now the fiddlers are all gone, and with the arts the industries have declined. Where are the coopers of Fogo? And there are other places noted for souters where now perhaps but a solitary cobbler plies his trade. For, alas! the Borders have been cleared much as the Highlands have been. You may meet with traces of the expatriated race, in patches of cultivated ground now thrown into sheep walks, in the crumbling walls of ruined cottages, and hearthstones that have long been cold.

There is a black well at Polwarth from which the stranger should not incautiously drink—for, says the Doom, if one drinks one never leaves the place. There is a similar superstition, it will be remembered, about an old well at Winchelsea; and it is curious to meet with the same tradition in places where there is no con-

necting link in the way of migration or settlement to account for it.

Polwarth is noted, too, as the ancient seat of the Humes, Barons of Polwarth, of whom a younger son, Alexander, was a poet of no mean order, if we may judge from his "Day Estival," already quoted. Of the same family was Patrick Hume, Earl of Marchmont, who, in danger of losing his head from his connection with the Covenanters, lay hidden for several weeks among the bones of his ancestors in the vault under Polwarth Church. His daughter, of whom the memoirs of Lady Grizel Baillie give a graphic account, was accustomed to visit him at night with supplies, braving all the superstitious terrors of the place, the tomb-lights and corpse-candles, to carry her father his nightly meal in his gruesome abode. The chief danger of discovery arose from a vigilant house dog at the manse, which barked at the disturber of the graveyard quietude with a persistence that threatened discovery. But, by raising the scare of mad dogs in the neighbourhood and by sacrificing a lap dog of their own, the ladies of the family induced the unsuspecting minister to destroy the faithful guardian of his premises.

"As the gloomy habitation my grandfather was in," writes Lady Grizel in a passage familiar to the young people who are now getting old, in the pages of Miss Edgeworth, "was not to be endured but from necessity, they were contriving other places of safety for him, particularly one, under a bed which drew out in a ground floor, in a room of which my mother kept the key. She and the same man worked in the night, making a hole in the earth after lifting up the boards, which they did by scratching it up with their hands, not to make any noise, till she left not a nail upon her fingers; she helping the man to carry the earth, as they dug it, in a sheet on his back, out at the window into the garden. He then made a box at his own house large enough for her father to lie in with bed and bed-clothes, and bored holes in the boards for air. When all this was finished, for it was long about, she thought herself the happiest creature alive."

Before leaving the Merse there is to be noted the beacon on the hill by Hume Castle which gave the false alarm of French invasion described in Scott's "Antiquary."

It was on the last days of January, 1803, that the watchman by Hume Castle caught sight of the glow of the beacon on the

coast, as he thought, and set light to his own fire. Teviotdale, Tweeddale, and Liddesdale were aroused, the men armed themselves and set out for the mustering places, marching in with the pipes blowing before them—

My name is little Jock Elliot
And wha daur meddle wi' me?

The women cheered and urged them on their way, while one old dame, in the Spartan spirit of Old Scotia, greeted an armed band that passed her cottage with the words, "Come back victorious or come not back at a'," while a less martial note is echoed in the utterance of the parish dominie, "But if the chiel Buonaparte should come owre to Britain, surely he will never be guilty o' the cruelty and folly o' doing onything to the parish schoolmasters."

Close by is the ancient seat of the Gordon clan, the original gowks o' Gordon, celebrated in the musical rhythm of the old ballad—

Huntley Wood—the wa's down
Bassandean and Barrastown,
Heckspeith wi' the golden hair,
Gordon gowks for ever mair.

Something may here be said of the Border clans, whether Gordons, Grahams, Scotts, Armstrongs, or others, who have little in common with the Highland Septs, united by a common ancestry and by a complete and complicated system of inheritance and tenure. The Border clan was a much more simple affair, and is rather an association for mutual defence and for common cause in raid or foray. Originally the population of the Borders differed little from that of the rest of Northumbria south of the Tweed. On the western March there may be some admixture of Celtic blood from the regions of Cumbria and Strathclyde, while the pure Scottish element can have been but small, although powerful; and eventually leavening the whole lump. But, till the Norman conquest of England introduced a more rigid distinction between the two nations, there was no trace of any national animosity between the two countries, with no need for any special organisation beyond the ordinary townships and hundreds. And thus the Border clans seem to have come into existence from the pressure of circumstances, a federation of fighting men for the protection of their own flocks and herds, and the acquisition of those belonging to other people, and leagued in alliance against the English power on one side and on the other against him whom the Borderers contemp-

tuously called the King of Fife and Lothian. Any bold fighting man who would swear fealty to the Chief was welcome to join the clan and assume its distinctive surname, while an equitable distribution of the plunder acquired by the tribe stocked the pasture lands of Chief and clansmen.

The rude towers of the Border chiefs are nowhere more plentiful than along the course of the Whiteadder river, where probably the Borderers only adopted and renewed the fortalices and entrenchments of an earlier race. All tradition points to this district as the final refuge, and the scene of the eventual extermination of the Picts.

As to the very origin of the Picts we have little to guide us; but tradition points to there having come from the north a strange uncanny race with perhaps Mongolian features in their dark and swarthy complexions, driven like the Finns and Lapps from the favoured parts of Scandinavia, by incursions and settlements of the fair-haired Teutonic tribes. Like the Lapps they were accounted great magicians, and they have survived in popular mythology as Pixie, Elf, Brownie, or Billyblind. Each Border tower is haunted by its familiar Redcap, a name which perhaps suggests the character of the Pictish head-dress.

It is no unlikely site this for the last stand of a defeated race. To the north there are steep ravines which a handful of men might defend against an army, and which at a later date were actually closed against Cromwell and his army, before the victory of Dunbar, by a small detachment of Covenanters. To the east are precipitous defiles, and the broad Tweed cuts off access from the south. When the outer defences of the land were carried or turned, the last stand of the Picts was made, so tradition says, on Cockburn-law, between Cranshaw Castle and Dunse. And here the remnants of an ancient race fought their last fight and were slaughtered—all but two, as old tradition says, an old man and his son, who were saved, as it seems, for a purpose.

To the Picts belonged the secret of a wondrous drink, a delicious and wholesome liquor, distilled from heather-bells. The manner of making it, says an old writer, has perished with the Picts, as they never showed the craft of making it except to their own blood. Now to turn the heather-bells to good advantage must have seemed a grand invention to a Scot, seeing that so noble a harvest was growing all around,

A wide domain,
And rich the soil had purple heath been grain.
or, according to an older rhyme, anent the
possessions of the bold Buccleuch,

Had heather bells been corn o' the best
Buccleuch had had a noble grist.

And thus to utilise a natural product seemed to the conquerors of the Picts a consummation worth a little pains. So the old man and the young one were brought before the King of the Scots, who offered them both their lives if they would reveal the secret. "Kill the other one first," said the father, pointing to his son, "and then I will tell you." The youth was quickly despatched. "Now kill me," said the old man; "my son might have yielded to your threats and promises. I never shall. Quick! Despatch!" The King condemned the old man to live on. And live he did, far beyond the ordinary span of human life, far on into later times. Then the old Pict, blind and bedridden, heard some youth of the period boasting of his athletic feats. "Give me your wrist," said the old man, "that I may judge if your strength is equal to that of the men of old." Prudently the bystanders handed the old man a thick bar of iron, which he twisted and bent, and then thrust away, saying, "You are not feeble, but you cannot be compared with the men of ancient times."

It has been whispered, indeed, that the secret of the wonderful drink of the Picts was not altogether lost, and its survival may be thus accounted for. The Picts, when they first landed in Scotland, consisted of men only, their womankind they had been obliged to abandon to their conquerors. In this hard case they applied to the Britons as well as to the Scots to provide them with wives, but neither race would ally themselves with the hated intruders. The Gaels, however, were not so particular, and bestowed their daughters on the strangers—the ill-favoured ones for choice, like muckle-mouthed Meg for instance. In this way the secret leaked out among the relatives of the Picts' wives, and thus the race became possessed of the art of making that ambrosial drink, called usquebaugh, or, in modern language, whiskey. And it is a curious fact, when you come to think of it, that among no other races than the Gaels of Ireland or of the Scotch Highlands is this liquor made in perfection.

The Borderers, and the Scotch in general, did not take to whiskey till a

period comparatively modern. Indeed, from an early date, London porter, or London beer at all events, seems to have been a favourite beverage, as in the "Day Estival" we have the labourers in the heat of the day refreshing themselves in this manner :

Some plucks the honey plumbs and pear
The cherry and the pesch,
Some likes the reamond London beer
Their body to refresh.

We may now pass on to Lammermuir, whose hills and ravines formed the defence of the fertile Merse, hills which break off in a rugged coast-line, the chief promontory of which is St. Abb's Head. The Head itself consists of two high mounts cut off from the mainland by a natural dyke. On the western height stands the broken tower of Fast Castle, gloomy and almost awful in its loneliness and desolation. The most seaward of the two is the Kirkhill, where once stood the old church, the earliest of all the churches of Scotland, almost on the verge of the precipice, where innumerable sea-fowl scream, and the surges thunder below against the rocky buttress. A tiny strip of beach affords a perilous landing-place, and one day the anchorites in the lonely church above saw a boat approaching, driven by wind and waves, but steered by a strong and skilful hand towards the beach. As well as the steersman the figure of a woman could be discerned, and the venerable fathers, hastening downwards by the perilous path, were just in time to receive the boat as it grounded. But there was only one passenger now on board, a young and beautiful Princess, from Northumbria, who had been cast adrift in the boat to perish. Clearly the boat had been steered to its haven by angelic hands, and the young Princess, forthwith taking the veil, founded the Priory of Coldingham, near at hand, and was afterwards canonized as Saint Abba.

The Priory of Coldingham, the mother of all the monasteries of Scotland, has left only a few foundations to preserve its memory : but the aspect is delightful, and the village which occupies the site is the pleasantest all along the coast. Coldingham Moor was once noted for its famous football play, where, once a year, there was a great match between married and single. The goal to be kicked by the former was any part of the sea-shore, while the single men had to drive the ball into a hole in the ground, or later, beneath the lintel of a barn-door. Under these unequal condi-

tions the married men, it is said, nearly always gained the victory.

The road that winds over the hills of Lammermuir was once greatly frequented by the farmers of the Merse, who rode to market at Haddington, each carrying his sack of corn. The chief stopping place on this lonely road was Dunskein Inn, about which a gruesome tale is told. The landlord, once upon a time, was a desperate and determined villain, and, if a guest was driven to seek shelter with him for a night, that guest was never more seen alive. Even those who only called at the house to bait and refresh, he would pursue at a distance till they arrived at a lonely and desolate spot among the peat bogs, when he would shoot down his victim ; and soon the yielding bog concealed all traces of the deed. So daring and yet so cautious was the man that, although long suspected, none had ventured to bring him to justice, till a Marquis of Tweeddale himself essayed the adventure. Disguising himself as a travelling merchant, he stopped to drink at the inn, and then rode on alone. Presently he heard the muffled sound of hoofs behind him, when a man masked and armed rode swiftly forward. But the Marquis was prepared, and, with a pistol-shot brought the villain to the ground. He lived long enough, it is said, to confess his crimes, and his body soon swung high on a gibbet, as a warning to evil-doers.

There now remains only Lauderdale to visit—the vale of the River Lauder. And a few miles above the junction with the Tweed is Earlston, with Cowden-knowes close by, the Parnassus of Scotland, a hill of no great height, overhanging the village, with irregular ridges which are the knowes.

More pleasant far to me the broom
So fair on Cowden-knowes,
For sure so sweet so soft a bloom
Elsewhere there never grows.

Somewhere close at hand grew the Eildon tree, where Thomas the Rhymer met the Fairy Queen, and, snatching a kiss from that sweet face, was presently carried off to serve his mistress in fairyland for seven years. Thomas is, perhaps, better known as prophet than poet, and his dark sayings even yet are not all fulfilled, while Thomas himself is said at intervals to revisit these glimpses of the moors :

Mysterious Rhymer, doomed by fate's decree
Still to revisit Eildon's lonely tree,
Where oft the swain at dawn of Hallow Day
Hears thy black barb with fierce impatience neigh.

But except for Earlston and the Rhymer

there is nothing very taking in the Vale of Lauder or in the memoirs of its cruel Duke ; the last and worst letter in the Cabal ; whose memory is still execrated among the descendants of the Covenanters.

A SPRING SONG.

SWEET ! let me see thine eyes, and place thine hand,
Thy fair small hand, in mine : nay, thou can'st
trust.

I love thee so ! None other in the land
Can love as I.

Nay, do not sigh.

Spring walks the earth and whispers thee, "Thou
must

Be one with me—and join my happy band !"

Sweet ! kiss me on the lips ! each day that's born
Brings us new beauties. Spring-tide has begun,
Yon hedge was black and bare but yester-morn,
Until the sun
Its prize had won !

And with a kiss, the sweet buds that did scorn

His vows, were bought—'twas thus the deed
was done.

Sweet ! lay thee in mine arms—close to my heart.

The life-blood rises, pulses but for thee.

See, as the sun shines forth how shades depart,

Away they flee ;

They may not be,

Where love and spring-tide act their joyous part,

Where thou and I shall wander presently.

Fair flower-buds that all this winter-tide

Have lain asleep, are blooming in yon bed ;

Whispering and nodding, as there side by side,

They meet once more :

For once before

They loved and kissed, till autumn's leaves were
shed,

And when they slept, the world was bleak and
wide.

Nay ! an thou hast not loved ; I'll teach thee,
sweet !

What were thy life, should love ne'er be the
prize,

'Twere spring without its flowers. Life is fleet.

Love me, mine own,

E'er spring be flown ;

'Tis true that clouds will hide these dappled
skies.

That we must part, need not forbid we meet ?

Sweet—let me see thine heart ! Spring-tide is there !

The flower of love was born there yesterday.

What though nor I nor thou canst truly swear

That there for aye

'Twill live away.

'Tis now the spring—'tis now thou'rt fresh and fair ;

So let us love—e'er spring-tide dies away !

STUDIES OF OVER THE WAY.

A HOUSE IN THE EUSTON ROAD.

IN THREE PARTS. PART II.

"DINNER passed very pleasantly, and under the influence of Kate's charming presence, and Sinclair's flow of humour, I gradually forgot my caution. When Kate left us over our wine, with an injunction not to let her remain too long alone in the drawing-room, every atom of reserve towards my host had vanished. We conversed for a few minutes on general topics,

and then threw ourselves into easy-chairs. Sinclair handed me a cigar, and for the first time that evening I thought he was gazing at me very attentively. I dismissed the action at once, however, blaming myself for my foolish suspicions. But before long a pleasant drowsiness began to steal over me. The puffs of smoke took fantastic shapes before my eyes, and every now and then changed colour in strange, but not unpleasing transitions. I felt as if in a quiet dream from which I did not wish to awake. Then a deadly torpor spread through my limbs, and a heavy weight dragged down my eyelids. A minute more, and a dull dark wall seemed to shut out every recollection of the past, and for a considerable time my memory is a blank. A succession of great physical exertions followed, of which, however, I was but vaguely conscious. One object, nevertheless, I afterwards called to mind—a huge, gnarled oak, around which a pale green light seemed to hover ; and then complete oblivion took possession of my senses.

"Another bright summer's morn, tuneful with the song of birds, the rustling of the breeze, and the murmuring of the ocean. I was in bed in my own room, but how I got there, I knew not. One by one, the events of the previous evening unfolded themselves, but only to excite greater astonishment. A vague, horrible dread began to steal upon my breast. Again the words which had so startled me before began to ring upon my ear ; again I thought of those instances in which one man had been known to command every thought and action of another. I looked at the tower clock in the distance. It was nearly noon. Springing up I dressed hurriedly, and went downstairs. I found that my brother had called to see me half-an-hour before, looked in at my door, and seeing me asleep had gone away again, leaving a message that he would return later on in the day. I asked the slatternly servant what time it was when I returned, saying, and with truth, that my watch had stopped, and that I had no idea of the hour, although I knew I had been very late. She replied that she had sat up for me till two o'clock, and expressed a good-natured wish that I was better, for, she said, when Mr. Sinclair took me upstairs, I looked pale and ill. I replied shortly, and commanded my features with an effort till she left the room. But then a wild, unreasoning fear unmanned me. I trembled in every limb, and my breath came and went

in quick, hard gasps. What did it all portend? I remembered nothing, or next to nothing; I had appeared ill, and Sinclair had brought me home. The first definite thought that presented itself was to question Sinclair, and so, dashing on my hat, I rushed from the house. The air refreshed me and cooled my brain, and by the time I had got half way to the Abbey I was calm enough to reflect that it would be wiser to think twice before speaking to Sinclair. Half-an-hour could not make much difference, and so soon as I got inside the Park, I turned down a shady avenue leading away from the Abbey, and strolled along, trying to arrange my scattered thoughts. A sharp turn in the road brought me suddenly beneath a vast oak. Casting my eyes up, I saw before me the very tree I remembered in my torpor. There, rising before me, was the same huge trunk, with one side blasted by lightning, and above, the great boughs knotted and contorted, as if in endless throes of anguish. Every detail came out clearly now, and I knew, knew with a convulsive spasm of dread, that I had been there the night before. And a horrible foreboding filled me, as I asked myself the question, Why?

"As I stood there, filled with terror, and vainly trying to realise my position, I became conscious that something unusual was occurring beyond the straggling hedge which formed on that side the boundary of the Park. Walking towards the nearest gaps, I descried about two hundred yards farther on an excited group of people standing round an object in the field. I hurried up, and pushed my way through the throng. The sight that met my eyes chilled my very heart's blood. A man was lying on his face, with the handle of a knife protruding from his back. A rustic, bolder than the rest, raised his head, and the face was fearfully battered. In an instant, a fearful thought flashed across me. My violent exertions the night before, the gnarled oak, the dead man, all presented a chain of evidence that seemed incontestable. The very idea was madness. My limbs trembled beneath me, my eyesight failed, and I should have fainted on the spot, had not I felt a strong hand upon my arm, holding me up, and leading me from the throng. The touch served to recall me to myself, and by a violent effort I suppressed all outward indications of the horrible dread within. Turning my head, I saw it was my brother who had come so opportunely to my aid.

"'Robert,' he said kindly, 'you mustn't try yourself by so fearful a spectacle. Some poor wretch has, I fear, been foully murdered. Let us leave the matter in the hands of justice.'

"We walked slowly home. I have but faint recollections of the rest of that day. It seemed like a terrible dream, and I could hardly persuade myself of its reality. I did not dare to question my brother, did not dare to speak of the day before, lest some fresh link should be added to the awful evidence, lest I should be branded as a murderer. All through the night the horrid knife was present to my eyes. The ghastly head haunted me like a phantom, and not till the light of dawn broke through my window did I fall into a troubled sleep.

"As I was coming down to breakfast late the following day, there was a violent ring at the door. A minute more, and Kate rushed, pale and agitated, into my arms, and burst into a flood of tears. For a short time she was unable to speak, and I was about to ring the bell and summon assistance, when she convulsively grasped my arm, and implored me in trembling accents to let no one enter till I had heard her story. At first she was almost incoherent, but grew calmer as she proceeded. She told me that after dinner, two days before, I had entered the drawing-room in a strangely absent state, and had gone away as if in a dream. Sinclair accompanied me, saying that he would see me home. That night she was unable to sleep. After the tower clock had struck two, she distinctly heard the front door opened by a latch-key, and a footstep in the hall she recognised as her uncle's. He went quietly to his room and closed the door. The lateness of the hour astonished her, but she thought little more of it at the time. At this point of her narrative she took a newspaper from her pocket, and begged me, in a faltering voice, to read a paragraph she pointed to. It related to the murder, and was to the effect that, on the night when it was committed, a tall, well-built man, in a white macintosh cloak, was seen by several people lurking under a large oak-tree near the spot. My own white macintosh was lying in a corner of the room, where I must have left it that evening, and towards it we both involuntarily turned our eyes.

"I saw plainly enough that the shudder which ran through my frame did not escape Kate's notice. She tried to smile and to say some cheerful words, but this attempt, as well as her simulated attitude of uncon-

cern, ended in dismal failure. The horror we neither of us dared to name spoke from our eyes. We were both of us conscious of its hateful presence: but to me, as I saw it, it was ten times more mystic and terrible than it was to the brave and loving girl who would have given her best blood to shield my head from the swoop of its hateful wings. Kate saw that suspicion would probably attach to me with regard to the murder. I saw this likewise; but I saw besides something far worse—the fulfilment of the dread which had been lately haunting me, the dread that there was another will which had equal share with my own in shaping my actions. It would have been terrible enough, supposing this will to have been uniformly benevolent. How frightful was the revelation, now almost a certainty, that it was sinister, cruel, and unscrupulous! I could bear Kate's agonised looks no longer, and rushing from the room I went, as if drawn by some strange fascination, out into the Park. I could see the towering branches of the blasted oak, but I dared not approach it. I sat down on a broken stone bench in a secluded corner. I remained for more than an hour, with my mind intensely bent on the solution of the mystery—the strange confused struggle of my vision, half mental, half physical, desperate as if I had been in the grip of death; the oak-tree suffused in the mysterious green light exactly like the tree near which the murdered man had been found; the white macintosh, that damning link in the chain of evidence. Beyond these three facts I found it hard to travel. I tried to start over and over again on a fresh train of thought; but my mind always reverted to them as so many proofs that Sinclair's influence over me was real and terrible, and to the conviction that he had singled me out as a subject for the exercise of his mysterious power. My imagination did not stop here. A horrible dread shaped itself that it might really have been my hand, urged by Sinclair's will, which had driven the knife into the heart of the victim.

"A footstep startled me. I looked up, and there was Sinclair close upon me. 'Robert,' he said in his soft, silvery voice, 'I have been looking for you everywhere. Come with me into the house. I want to talk to you.'

"I looked at him, dazed and terrified. I dreaded to see him, to speak to him, much more to go alone with him into his room. Seeing me hesitate, he sat down beside me. 'I know what is worrying you, my

dear fellow: but don't be cast down. These local police are always over-officious, and we must take this story of the man in the white macintosh for what it is worth. At any rate, yours is not the only one in the country; but come in with me now.'

"He rose and led the way back to the house, and, as I walked, I felt the same hateful, numbing spell creeping over me. My brain was half paralysed, and I could but liken myself to a helpless bird under the glare of the serpent. All power of volition seemed passing away when suddenly, I cannot say how or why, the thought arose that it was only one man's will I had to fight against. Hitherto the odds had been all in my adversary's favour. He had attacked me by stealth, and had overcome me before I even knew there was a contest. But now my eyes were opened, and possibly I might find this will to be no stronger than my own should I meet it on equal terms.

"We entered the library, the room in which my terrible trance had fallen upon me, and Sinclair motioned to me to sit down in the same chair I had occupied the last time I was there. As I sat down I resolved that his victory this time should be no easy one. I determined, however, on no account to undecieve him. I would feign submission to his spells and find out, one way or another, the secret of the devilish plot he had in hand while he should be off his guard. I would let him believe he still had over me power as great as ever, and mark what he would do as soon as I might appear to have succumbed to his influence.

"As Sinclair motioned to me to sit down there floated over his face a smile which had often fascinated and terrified me, and deep down within his eyes I could discern a brightening glow which I recognised and dreaded. Now I knew the moment had come when I must put forth all my powers of will; but, clearly as I saw this necessity, I felt that these powers, even as I would call them into their highest activity, began to fail me. The lethargy which stole over me, fatal as I knew it to be, was not unpleasant. Sinclair moved behind my chair, and I was almost sure I saw him make one or two rapid passes with his hand as he crossed the room. Still I held out, though hard pressed. How long I might have done so I cannot say, had not the church bell at that moment began to toll. It was like the presage of my impending doom, and its mournful notes seemed to arouse

my failing energies. I sat motionless and silent, with my eyes fixed as if I were in the deepest trance, but my mind was no longer spell-bound. After a moment I knew I had conquered. The spell was broken. My faculties were more clear and active than I had known them for long past, and I sat and awaited the next move.

"After a minute or two Sinclair passed round the table and stood facing me. He again made mesmeric passes before my face, and pressed his finger on my forehead between my eyes. Though I was terribly agitated I kept my composure. Then he told me to sit down at a writing-table and copy what he would repeat to me. I took a pen and wrote word for word the stanza of a poem which he dictated, and as soon as I had finished he came round and looked over my shoulder at what I had written. He then told me to tear it up and put it in the waste basket. This was repeated three times, and after each copying I obeyed his command and destroyed what I had written.

"Then Sinclair rose, and going to a carved oak cabinet he pressed his hand on the head of a grotesque figure, fashioned in one of the angles. A panel fell down, disclosing a secret recess, out of which he took a packet of letters. He read them over carefully, making notes from time to time, and when he had finished he gave me a fresh sheet of paper, and told me to write again as he should direct.

"The words he dictated to me are graven on my mind as if in letters of fire. Should I live for a thousand years I could never forget one of them. They were these :

"MY DEAR SINCLAIR,—I write to you in great trouble. I feel I must tell some one what straits I am in, and there is no one in the world I would sooner make my confidant than you. There is a wretched story in my life which you know nothing about. It will not profit to tell you the whole of it, so I will tell you just enough to make you understand how hard I am pressed, and no more.

"The prologue I will pass over. It is just the ordinary succession of weakness, folly, crime, desperation, and impending ruin. I am at once the sinner and the victim. If my secret were my own I should only have conscience to reckon with, and there it would end ; but it is not so. This miserable secret is known to one who has been my bane and evil genius from the beginning, a villain who is now

driving me mad by his threats and persecutions. I am well-nigh ruined in pocket, and every week this devil threatens that, if I do not give up the little that remains, he will tell the world all he knows, and lodge me in a prison before sunset. He has ordered me to meet him to-morrow evening under the great oak in the Park here, and my first thought was that I had no alternative but to obey ; but the more I think about it the more clearly I see that I shall incur well-nigh as much danger by going as I shall by disregarding his summons. A rat will turn and bite if it be pressed too hard, and I feel it may be difficult for me to keep my hands from this villain's throat if I meet him alone. Shall I go or not ? I know I may trust you, my dear friend, to keep my secret, and to give me your best counsel. Only one more word : judge me not too harshly should you hear I have been unequal to further self-restraint."

"I signed and dated the letter two days before the date of the murder as Sinclair directed me, and sat still as a dead man till he spoke again. 'Now put what you have written into an envelope, and seal it with the signet ring you wear on your finger.' I dared not hesitate, though these last words of his showed me how surely and inextricably he was making me knot the halter round my own throat ; and I resolved that, at any cost, this writing should never pass into his hands. I detached two sheets of paper as I prepared to blot what I had written, and it was the blank sheet which I folded and placed in the envelope. I then sealed it with my signet ring, and having addressed it to Sinclair, waited again for his commands. The sheet upon which I had written I slipped unnoticed, thank Heaven ! into the sleeve of my coat. Sinclair then advanced towards me, and taking up the letter he cut open the top of the envelope with his penknife, so as not to injure the seal. He then put it away in an iron safe, and replaced the letters he had been reading in the secret drawer, and closed the panel. Then he made some horizontal passes across my body and face, and shook me to recall me from the stupor in which he believed I had been cast. I at once caught the cue, and feigned to recover as from a mesmeric trance. I rubbed my eyes, and gave a sleepy assent to Sinclair's bantering remarks about my drowsiness. 'You have had a nap, Bob,' he said. 'It will do you good. I did not disturb you, as I could see you were worried by what

has happened. I don't like to trouble you about it, but there is one thing I must tell you. The police are watching this house, as well as other houses in the place. I have seen the superintendent, and have ventured to promise in your name that you will not leave L—— till after the inquest.

"I murmured a few words to the effect that he had done quite right; and after some commonplace remarks, during which I felt it a hard matter to retain my composure, I took my leave.

THE DUKE OF THE SAUCEPAN.

"BRAVO! Bravo, Duca! Oh, the generous soul! The dear one! Oh, beloved of the San Stefanati! Oh, noble mind! May the benediction of our Lord, and the protection of the Madonna and all the saints be with him!" And then, crushing, struggling, shouting, smiling, the populace of Verona crowd up to the gates of the palazzo of the Via San Alessio, and make a wild rush to kiss the hand of their benefactor. What piles of loaves, what mountains of meat and grain, what rivers of wine that generous hand has dispensed to-day! No wonder old Monna Tita, hump-backed and lame as she is, is willing to be jostled and trampled under foot almost in order that she may press the Duke's hand to her lips and heart, and shedding the rare tears of old age, implore the blessing of Heaven to rest upon him and his for ever. With the characteristic good humour of an Italian crowd, even her jostling fellow townsmen find time to say a kind word to her and to each other. "There she goes! Monna Tita, eh, yes! Coraggio, mother! don't mind a little tumbling. And there's Gianni the zoppo (lame one), he too! What has the Duke given you, brother?"

"Four flasks of wine, and two sacks of grain, and *pane* and *paste* (bread and macaroni) for a royal dinner!"

"That's right, Gianni! Bravo! To the Duke again! Eh, he's fallen down, poor fellow! He can't reach Eccellenza's hand. So, there, there! Wait a little, Luvio, to kiss the Duke's hand, for Gianni's fallen down. Eh, bravo, Gianni! Good people, Gianni's kissing the Duke's foot, since he can't reach his hand; and right enough too, for the Duke is the saint and guardian angel of the Veronese! Evviva, Evviva! Long live the Duke of San Stefano and the Pignatta!"

And once again the gay crowd, clad

in the motley-coloured garments of the Carnival, raise a shout of acclamation which rends the very skies, as a shower of golden grain and copper coins falls upon them from the hand of the Duke, who, escaping at last from their loving, grateful grasp, has had the palace gates shut, and now appears on the terrace, from whence he throws his largesse broadcast. No doubt it is a proud, as well as a happy—nay, a blessed moment in his life. To have the power to shed the light of happiness on so many worn and weary faces, to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to bring comfort—even plenty—into many homes where for years it has been nothing but a name, all this it has been his to do. And more. Born in the dark and wretched quarter of San Stefano in Verona, yet feeling for that particular quarter a patriotic and local love which none but an Italian with his strong local attachments can understand, he has been able, alone and unaided, to reclaim it in a great measure from beggary, dirt, and squalor; and every night he lays his head on his own luxurious pillow with the happy consciousness of having lightened the burden of many hearts that day; while, if grateful prayers can bring deep sleep and happy dreams, no slumbers can be more blessed than his.

To the long list of his splendid and almost fantastically generous charities, he has to-day added the crowning generosity of the "Feast of the Pentata," or in the Veronese dialect, the "Pignatta:" that is, every poor family in Verona has to-day dined sumptuously at his expense, and an abundant largesse has, as we have seen, been given at his palace gates. It is a beautiful abode, that palace of the Via San Alessio, with a noble court and staircase, adorned with palm-trees and bronze leopards; a splendid loggia, shut in by lofty windows of stained glass, and furnished with rich divans and magnificent bronzes; and to the west a noble view over the wide and lovely garden of the Convent of San Giorgio. Within are long suites of sumptuous and richly furnished rooms, the door of one of which, on the ground floor, bears the inscription: "I never lend." The poor Duke is so assailed by beggars that it has become necessary for him to defend himself in some way. And it is a proverb in Verona that, though he may refuse to lend, he never is unwilling to give.

To-day, as we have said, his happiness, as his generosity, is at its height. Not only has

he feasted the populace of Verona, but the light of official approval has been given to his "Bacchanalia della Pignatta" (Revels of the Saucepan) by the presence of the Sindaco and other Veronese officials. And everything has gone off well. The feasting and revelry have been kept within decent bounds; the generosity has been unlimited, and the gratitude of the populace is in proportion. Now, as the night creeps on to the small hours, as the palace gates are shut, the lights extinguished, and all the world asleep, a single figure lingers in the Via San Alessio. It is poor Beppo, the blind man, to whom the night is as the day, and who has come to repay, in his own simple way, the princely charity he has received. It is true that the Duke sleeps; he will never know, in all probability, the full extent of the blind man's deep gratitude, but nevertheless Beppo will stand there at the palace gates, all night long, murmuring prayers for the welfare of his benefactor. And when the bell rings, at four o'clock, for first mass, and he creeps into the church of San Giorgio, with a cheerful sense that his vigil is over, and that he at least has done his duty to the beloved Duke, Beppo knows well that the church will be crowded with the Duke's pensioners, and that all about him the worshippers—poor and humble ones, most of them—are imploring blessings on their guardian angel.

Surely the Duke must be blessed above measure to win such ardent gratitude! "Vox populi, vox Dei," says the proverb, and does not a still more ancient proverb say that he for whom the poor cease not to pray, shall never want for happiness? If that be so, there is no need to tell the fortune of the Duke of San Stefano and the Pignatta; he is fenced from all evil chance by the prayers of the poor whom he has succoured. The stars have looked down to-night upon the innocent revelry of which he has been the author, and upon the grateful watcher at his gates, and they are still hanging in the sky as the worshippers come out from the first mass where they have been to pray for him. But they are not soothsayers, those fair cold stars, or they would turn blood-red, as a sign of evil portent, since, if the Duke is to be rewarded, it must be in some other world than this. Here, in but a few days, a solitary, dishonoured death, and an unblest grave awaits him.

Siro Zuliani, dubbed by the populace of Verona, the Duke of San Stefano—the

quarter in which he was born—and also quite as often the Duke of the Pignatta, or saucepan, was born in Verona some thirty-five years ago, of a very humble family. He was always a silent, reserved, and rather melancholy boy, with a taste however for whatever was bizarre and eccentric in costume, and, whenever he had the means, he arrayed himself in clothes which were as far as possible a travesty of the reigning fashion. Quite early in life he obtained a situation in a commercial house in Verona at a stipend of 200 francs a month, and he retained this situation and discharged its duties to the entire satisfaction of his employers up to the last day of his life. About five years before his death he became suddenly—no one has ever known how—possessed of an ample fortune, and he at once launched out into a wild extravagance which was a never-ending source of wonder and interest to the Veronese. He bought an old convent in the Via San Alessio, and converted it into a superb palace, which he furnished in the most luxurious manner. He added a garden, a conservatory, and an aviary, and his equipages were on a scale of equal splendour. Fortunately for his fellow townsmen his generosity kept pace with his taste for luxury, and it was a favourite saying with the Veronese that, for every mouthful His Excellency put into his mouth, he gave two away. As an example of the scale of his charities, it may be as well to mention that he gave to the husband of his wife's sister a pension of 1,500 francs—sixty pounds—a month, and that his other gifts were on the same scale. "He had a passion for beneficence," said one of his friends, and it was a passion which he indulged without stint.

The great families of Verona have long since ceased to be very rich, and though charitable, cannot afford to be lavish in giving, so that Siro Zuliani soon became a famous person. He was the idol of the populace, and it was the popular voice which awarded him the sobriquet of Duke of St. Stefano, when he had only been for a few months a public benefactor. For long before his death he was never addressed by any one, even by his employers, otherwise than as "Duca." This gentle-hearted, open-handed man, was proverbially serious, silent, and reserved. Never; even to his wife, with whom he lived on terms of the greatest affection; did he betray the secret of his wealth, which was neither inherited, nor earned,

nor stolen, nor won in a lottery—the popular mind suggested all these hypotheses, and rejected them all. Among other things it was whispered that Zuliani—who was a Mason—had been concerned in an enormous robbery, planned by the Masonic confraternity in general, and that he was appointed almoner of the ill-gotten goods! This ridiculous fable was exploded after a time as the others had been, and the mystery loomed more impenetrable than ever. But the poor of the quarter—the Sanstefanati as they are called in Verona—invented a theory which satisfied them completely, and even called a smile of approbation, though not of assent, to the Duke's grave face. The Duke—so the Sanstefanati asserted—had found a pot or saucepan, in some place unspecified, and the said pot or pignatta was full of golden coins, each coin of fabulous value. "In truth it was the best story which had yet been invented," the Duke said, and the populace were happy.

During the years—five in all—that Zuliani was leading this life of luxury, extravagance, and beneficence, he was invariably punctual in attendance at Casa Laschi—the bureau of his employers—and scrupulously faithful in the discharge of his duties, always spending the allotted hours at his desk, and never absenting himself on any pretext whatever, or assuming any airs of independence with his employers, who, whenever questioned as to the origin of his fortune, replied that he was an honest man, and did his duty so thoroughly by them that they never ventured to inquire into his affairs.

The Italians are a loving and a grateful race, and, during the last two years of his life, the Duca della Pignatta could scarcely move along the streets of Verona without being conscious of receiving an ovation of a quiet kind, in the looks of affectionate welcome and the murmur of approbation which followed his footsteps. His prosperity and popularity reached their height, as has been said, on the Monday in Carnival week—the Monday before Ash Wednesday—when he feasted all the poor of the city of Verona. Several of the gentlemen who stood beside him on the balcony over his palace gate, as he threw his largesse to the crowd, noticed that, as the shouts of acclamation reached his ears, he seemed more deeply moved than usual. Never very demonstrative, he did not in any way abandon himself to the enthusiasm of the moment, "but the peculiar brightness of the eye, very perceptible

in him when he had performed a kind action," was more vivid than usual, and once or twice he seemed to be struggling with suppressed emotion.

The festival, however, drew to its end; the guests departed. In two days more the Carnival ended and Lent began. Early in Lent the Casa Laschi audited its accounts. They were found to be perfectly correct, showing no deficit whatever; but there was a mistake of 8,000 francs, which needed correction. Zuliani's attention was called to this—it may here be observed that there was absolutely no deficit, but that there had been a mistake in copying merely—and he at once said that he would take the books home and examine them. This he did, and, early in the evening, sent his wife to bed, observing that he was obliged to sit up and write letters. Left alone, he called his valet, with whose assistance he drenched the books with petroleum, and then carried them on the terrace, where they were burned. He then wrote a letter, directed and sealed it, and placed it on his library table. Later, he went into his wife's room and bid her good-bye, saying that he was obliged to spend a day at Mantua on business; but that hereafter he should lead a quiet life, adding: "I am weary of these perpetual agitations." He took the three o'clock train for Mantua, which place he reached at five in the morning, and he went at once to an albergo, the Croce Verde, where he locked himself in his room. He never left it again. The door was broken open at five in the afternoon, and the body of the unfortunate Zuliani was found, lying face downwards on the ground in a pool of blood. The revolver, a small pocket one, with which he had shot himself, lay on the carpet beside the body. On the table several letters, each duly folded, sealed, and directed, were lying, and two telegrams, upon each of which the requisite fee was placed. The letter which he left on his library table in Verona was addressed to his brother-in-law, and ran as follows:

"DEAREST BROTHER-IN-LAW, — The Laschi have assumed that I was a bad man, and I now show myself to be such. I have burned their books, and now depart to make an end of myself. My secret will go with me to the tomb. Two persons of the highest distinction alone know something—. The monthly pension of 1,500 francs ceases with my life.

"Sell the house and furniture, pay my debts, and provide for my wife with what remains.

"If my wife wishes to marry again, she has my full consent to do so; and I hope that she may find some one who will love her as well as I have done. And now farewell until we meet again in heaven with the dear Mother.

"My best compliments to the Sindaco, the prefect, and my colleagues.

"SIRO ZULIANI."

Some days before the poor fellow's death he said to a friend: "My life, like my death, will remain a mystery. The Veronese will wish to know something of both; but it is too late." When urged to explain what he meant, he added that he had "distressing thoughts." Although of a generous and affectionate disposition, he was extremely excitable, and, when angry, very violent, and apt to break whatever he laid hands on. These moments of intense excitement, however, were rare, and passed quickly, and for some time before his death, though profoundly melancholy, he had not been in the least excited or irritated. The letters he wrote at Mantua were addressed to the prefect and to his wife, and contained each a few words of adieu. One of the telegrams was to his employers of the Casa Laschi, and was on business, the other was addressed to his brother-in-law, and ran as follows:

"Protect the two poor women. Be a father to them. Kiss my poor Luigia for me.

"SIRO ZULIANI."

All Zuliani's affairs were found to be in perfect order, his private account books accurately balanced, and his receipts duly filed. He had been harassed by many difficulties for some time before his death, but his debts only amounted to about 20,000 francs, a sum that was amply covered by the sale of his horses and carriages. Nothing was ever discovered which accounted in any way for his distress of mind, or for the act of suicide; and the origin of his fortune, as well as its loss—it lost it was—still remains wrapped in impenetrable mystery. All that was found to belong to the "Duke" was the Palace in the Via San Alessio, with its furniture, which was sold for the payment of his few debts and for the support of his widow.

No sooner did the news of his death reach Verona, than the populace crowded the Via San Alessio and the streets leading in that direction, and the sound of mourners was heard in the city of Verona, "as if there were not a house in which there were not one dead." The theatres were

closed, and at all the usual places of rendezvous but one subject was discussed, the death of the popular hero.

His dead body lay for three days in a small mortuary chapel at Mantua, which was constantly visited by his friends, and then buried at midnight, and, necessarily, without religious ceremonies of any kind. Later, a subscription was raised in Verona, and the remains were transported thither. The poor, who from the time of his death had not ceased to throng the Via San Alessio, now crowded to the railway station to receive his dead body, and with "weeping, and wailing, and many bitter cries," accompanied it to the grave. As the vast procession crept slowly through the beautiful city, the sounds of lamentation and of prayer rose and fell with the trampling of many feet, and not the least pathetic part of the procession were the blind, the halt, and the lame, who, struggling far in the rear, still followed patiently until all that was mortal of their benefactor was laid in the earth.

The grave of the poor "Duca" is covered by a handsome monument with a bronze medallion, but in point of fact it is not the monument which distinguishes it from its kindred mounds. Leading directly to it is a small footpath, worn through the grass by the tread of many feet, and there at morning and evening, and often far into the night, kneeling figures are to be seen—the faithful grateful poor, who go there to pray for the soul of their benefactor.

VICTIMS.

By THEO GIFT.

Author of "*Lil Lorimer*," "*An Alibi and its Price*,"
Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER XII. A SUDDEN RECALL.

FOR the first minute or so after Joanna's announcement no one spoke. Vera, indeed, who had started to her feet at the unexpected sight of the old servant, and made as if to dart forward, stood still instead, white and staring; while Leah, who had stopped playing and was leaning forward, her hands still resting on the keys, and Marstland, slowly drawing himself into an upright position, and frowning surprisedly at the harsh-voiced intruder, appeared (as was indeed the case) uncertain as to whether they had heard correctly or not.

It was Vera, after all, who had to speak, and spoke first.

"To—fetch me home!" she repeated,

the dismay caused by the suggestion showing so plainly in the trembling of her voice, that it was all Marstland could do to restrain himself from putting his arm round her. "I—I don't understand. Is papa worse then, Joanna?"

"Not as I'm aware of," said Joanna curtly. "Leastways he was nearly well till your letter came. After that he wasn't so well, or your ma would have come for you herself. They'll be at Les Châtaigniers, however, before we shall, so you'll see him soon enough."

There was so little encouragement in the tone of these last words that Vera trembled more than ever, and Leah, who felt annoyed at what she considered the insolence of the woman's manner, thought it time to interfere.

"You haven't seen me yet, I think, Joanna," she said, rising from her seat at the piano, "and your sudden appearance has taken us all by surprise, Miss Vera especially. Sit down, pray, while you talk to her, and I will order some refreshment for you. You must be very tired, if you have only just arrived from your long journey; but I hope M. and Madame St. Laurent are not really wanting your young lady at home."

"They're not wanting her only, Miss Josephs; they've sent me to fetch her," said Joanna, with decided emphasis on the final verb, "and I'm in no need of refreshments, thank you. If Vera'll show me which is her room, she and me can begin packing at once; for trains and steamers wait for nobody, so there ain't no time for delay."

"But—you are not dreaming of taking her to-night!" cried Marstland, unable to repress himself longer, or keep one hand from closing in a protective clasp on the drooping shoulder of the girl he loved. "The idea would be madness. Besides, there must be a letter from her parents. Vera, dear, this person cannot mean——"

"Begging your pardon, sir, whoever you are," Joanna interrupted, "Vera knows well enough that 'this person,' as you're pleased to call her, generally do mean what she says; as likewise that she isn't likely to ha' come all this way, and crossed that beastly sea for nothing. Here's your ma's letter, Vera. I'd have kep' it for you till we were alone; but if you like these folk to see it that's your affair."

She held out the missive as she spoke, and Vera took it, but with such evident reluctance and alarm as puzzled Marstland,

and made Leah almost impatient with her. She did not even open it, only held it helplessly in her hand as she asked, very low and wistfully:

"Joanna, is—is mamma angry?"

Joanna shrugged her shoulders, a gesture more significant than respectful; and Leah, seeing that Marstland's indignation was rising beyond restraint, broke in laughingly:

"My dear Vera, why should your mother be angry with you? What a nervous child you are! Why, you know, dear," coming up to her friend and taking her little cold hand soothingly, "we quite thought your parents would want you home once they got your letter. We were talking of it only this morning, though we didn't realise then that the parting would be so soon."

"It cannot be," said Marstland hotly. "It is out of the question. Why, what time is it now? Nearly six! Darling, read your letter, and you will see it is some stupid mistake. You will not go to-night."

The strong deep accents, and the pressure of those powerful fingers on her shoulder seemed to give Vera courage. The colour came back into her face, and she looked up at Joanna with a faint smile. "It is some mistake," she repeated; "but don't stand there, Joanna. Sit down while I read mamma's letter. She will tell me what she wants."

And in the fewest words! The letter when opened only covered half a sheet of paper, and ran as follows:

"MY DAUGHTER,—Your father has been so horrified and upset by the news received this morning, that he is neither able to go to you himself nor to spare me. We are sending Joanna, therefore, with authority to bring you home to us at once; and you are to look on her as taking my place, and comply with all her arrangements without making extra trouble and difficulty for her. Do this, unless you wish to increase your papa's anger, and pray never mention again the foolishness about which you wrote to me. We expect you to put it out of your head at once, and to assist us to forget it also. I send no message to the Josephses, as I consider they've behaved most indelicately and dishonourably with regard to the trust I put in them; but your papa says he intends to send them a cheque for your keep. Lose no time now in returning to your grieved and displeased

"MOTHER."

Poor Vera! The letter fluttered down

into her lap, and both hands went up to cover her face, but only for a moment.

"Oh, she can't mean it!" she exclaimed piteously, as Marstland, rather pale himself, uttered a sound of interrogation. "She says I am to come back and forget—forget! Oh, you said it was a mistake, and it must be. Leah, read it and say it is. She—she can't mean to forbid—"

She had turned towards her lover as she spoke, stretching out her hands to him as if for protection; and he took them both in a firm clasp, though his eyes were turned on Leah, whose flushing cheek and sparkling eye, as she read, told plainly enough the indignation aroused in her by one part of the epistle.

"I do not quite know what your mother does mean, Vera, except that you are to go back," she said, trying to speak calmly, "but she has certainly made more than one mistake which—ah! here comes father," for at that moment Professor Josephs entered the room, surveying the agitated little group with curious eyes as he asked quickly:

"Why, George—why, girls, what's amiss here? Surely—" his mind leaping to a sudden conclusion as he became aware of the presence of a hard-featured woman in black, whose red hair was just then strongly illumined by the setting sun, "this is not Madame St—"

"No, father, it is Madame's maid," said Leah quickly, though struck anew by the resemblance which she had before noticed between the two women. "She has come to take Vera home—at once."

And as Vera and Joanna repeated the same thing in different words, the old gentleman had no need to ask further as to the disturbance on the lovers' brows. He turned to his young guest, who had crept nearer to him, as if for sympathy, and spoke to her in a low tone, but with his kindest smile.

"To go home, eh? Well now, you know, this is what I rather expected. I warned George, you know, that you had both been a little hasty in settling matters for yourselves, and then looking on them as settled; and you mustn't wonder if the old people don't see it in the same light, and want to see and know something of this young man before considering his proposals. I bet you that's what I should do if Leah there had written me from Brittany, that she had got engaged to some young Frenchman—and I suppose that's the state of the case, eh?"

"Except that Vera's parents don't seem to want either to see or know me," said Marstland bitterly, "or to look on my proposal as worth considering. No, Vera, dear, don't show him the letter," as the young girl, with that curious dulness of perception in matters of good taste or delicacy which she sometimes manifested, and which had allowed her to show it to Leah, held it timidly out to him. "It was meant—to be private, I don't doubt, and would only annoy the Professor to read."

"I should certainly decline to read any young lady's letters from her mother," said the Professor briskly; "but haven't you one yourself then, George?"

"No, sir; they haven't condescended even to answer me, and—"

"If this gentleman is Dr. Marstland, he should ha' told Mr. Sinlorren he was living in the same house as Miss Vera here, and then he'd have had his letter at the same time," Joanna put in hardily. "Madame told me he gave his address as 111, Phillimore Gardens, and I posted a letter to him there as soon as ever I got to Waterloo this morning."

"And it is probably there now, seeing that that is Dr. Marstland's address, and that he is only calling here this afternoon," observed the Professor, checking Marstland's attempt at a more haughty rejoinder. "At the same time, as I do not think it respectful to Miss St. Laurent to be discussing these matters before her servant, I will ask you, Leah, my child, to have some food got ready for this good woman. We can easily put her up till her young mistress leaves us, which, if your mother says 'at once,' means, I suppose, my dear, a good-bye to us as early as to-morrow."

"Joanna said to-night!" said Vera plaintively, and with a glance of piteous appeal in Marstland's direction. The Professor raised his eyebrows comically.

"Then Joanna is a much-to-be-envied person, my dear, for possessing a stomach capable of standing out two nights on the Channel. Still, if your mother wishes it—"

"Which, if you please, sir, she does," said Joanna, though in a more respectful tone. Despite the old scientist's lean, bent form and shabby coat, there was evidently something in the mild dignity of his manner, his long beard, and a certain humorous twinkle behind the spectacles which shielded his keen-looking eyes, which inspired her with more deference than the youthful and stalwart manliness of George Marstland.

"Not that you're right, begging your pardon, as to me being a good sailor, sir, as dogs couldn't be sicker every time I set my foot on a steamer's deck; but Mounseer, he said to me, 'Now remember, I trust to you not to delay even a night in England,' and when I'm trusted, I'm to be relied on. I should ha' been here hours ago if Vera hadn't written from Barnes, so that her ma thought she would still be there."

"Oh, Joanna, I am sorry," said Vera penitently. "I left there directly after writing; but——"

"Oh, it don't matter, so I've found you in the end," Joanna interrupted. "I'm a first-rate packer, and I've just had a good meal, thanking the gentleman for his offer all the same. So if you'll take me to the room where your things are——"

"My daughter will do that for you," said Mr. Josephs quietly. "If Miss St. Laurent has to start so soon on such an unforeseen and tiring journey, she will want both rest and food before starting, and must take them, whatever other people do. Don't think me too authoritative, my dear," turning to Vera with his old kind smile; "but while you are in my house, you know, you are like my child, and I am your guardian and bound to arrange what I think best for your health and well-being. Therefore, put yourself in that big arm-chair and stay there till I give you leave to come out of it; and, Leah, take this good woman to her young lady's room and tell your mother, in passing, what has happened, and that we want dinner to be ready in half-an-hour at latest."

It was in vain for Joanna to protest. She did try to do so, smarting inwardly under the superiority assigned to Vera over her, the girl's own cousin; to insinuate even that her instructions had been not to let the young lady out of her sight once she had reached her; but fate, or the Professor, was against her. With a perfectly bland and polite perversity he seemed unable to hear or understand what she was driving at, and only reiterated his orders with a peremptoriness which even she felt compelled to obey.

She followed Leah from the room accordingly, fearing that if she did not do so she might after all miss the train through her own fault; and as soon as they were gone the Professor turned to the two lovers and observed:

"Now, George, I'm going to be good-natured enough to fetch that letter of yours

for you. Only don't begin to cry your eyes out as soon as I'm gone, my little girl; and you, Marstrand, be a man and keep up her heart. Remember, if you had spoken to her parents first this wouldn't have happened. As it is, you've got to do so now, and win her humbly, and cap in hand, instead of looking on her as won."

"As if I wouldn't win you on my bare knees, if needful!" cried Marstrand passionately as the door closed. "My darling, come here. It is impossible that they should refuse you to me when they know how we love one another. It is quite true that I forgot about your father being French, and that I ought to have propitiated him first; but you will forgive me for that, Vera, won't you, dearest? For you know that it was only because it was impossible for me to remember anyone or anything else when you were present."

And then, as Vera only answered by a burst of tears, the more unrestrained because with difficulty kept back till now, the young lover took her, for the first time in their brief courtship, into his arms; and in the work of soothing her it seemed only a bare minute or two before the bang of the hall-door and the Professor's cough outside showed that he had returned. He was merciful to them even then, however, for he only put in his head, and handed the letter to his ex-pupil, saying with a great affectation of haste:

"Here it is. Came by two o'clock post. No, I shan't come in. I've a load of work waiting. Keep the child resting, that's all." And off he went again to his study below. No one else came near them; and Marstrand, kneeling beside Vera, with one arm round her waist, tore the letter open, both of them trembling with eagerness.

It was in French, and, translated, ran as follows:

"MONSIEUR,—I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your proposal for the hand of my daughter. In declining the same absolutely, and without the customary apologies, permit me to mention that gentlemen, in this country at least, are ordinarily too honourable to condescend to the cowardice of intriguing the consent of a young girl when away from her parents' roof, and without applying to them in the first instance. When you receive this, Mdlle. St. Laurent will have been reclaimed within the protection of her family, and I am under the necessity of begging that from this moment your acquaintance with her ceases.

"Accept, monsieur, the assurance of my very humble devotion, and believe me, etc., etc.,

"PHILIPPE MARIE ST. LAURENT."

Perhaps in all London that sunny afternoon in late August, there were not two young faces paler than those bent above the letter just transcribed; but Marstland's was white with indignation, and in his effort to hold it under control and keep back the words, "Insolent, overbearing old fool!" he crushed the paper together, and striding across the room stood looking out of the nearest window without speaking. He had not remained there for more than a minute or so, however, devouring his wrath and mortification in silence, when his elbow was very timidly touched, and turning he saw that Vera was at his side, her face still blanched with the pallor which had come over it on reading her father's curt, contemptuous missive; but wearing also an expression of mingled terror and desperation such as he had rarely before seen on a girl's features.

"George," she said, trembling very much, and the words so thrilled and fired him, for it was the first time her shyness had ever permitted her to use his Christian name, that he forgot everything else, and snatching her to him covered her lips with kisses. "George, what—am I to do?"

"To do, my own darling? How do you mean?"

"You see," she almost whispered, "papa says our acquaintance is to cease now, now! and mamma tells me to forget. What am I to do?"

Marstland smiled scornfully.

"My acquaintance with you, Vera," he said, in the full, strong tones which seemed as though by an electric current to fill the girl's feeble veins with new blood and vigour, "will never cease while you and I are alive, nor, please Heaven, after our death. And for you—but you know best—do you think you will forget me, love?"

"Forget you! How could I? You know I could not," she answered quite simply. "After death—well, I suppose we shall be in heaven. One cannot think about that, it is so far away; but I would rather be here with you, just as we are, even than that; and so—so—George, I don't know how to bear it. I feel that if I once go away—go back there—I shall never see you again. They will not let me; and I would rather die. Tell me what to do. You are so strong and clever,

you must know what is best. I will do just as you say."

And in that moment Marstland felt certain that she would. It was a temptation and a test too, a powerful one for a young man of strong passions and impetuous energy, this frail, slender creature clinging to him with her soft hands, gazing at him with her appealing eyes, and he knowing that he had only to say: "Don't go. Refuse. Say you are ill, that you must have a day's grace, and slip out in the morning to be married to me," and that she would do it, and would probably never repent it through all the happy years that they might live together. A terrible temptation indeed! and whatever others he may have succumbed to in after years, it should be remembered to Marstland's credit that he did resist this; thrust it scornfully away from him as it rose in seductive colours before his eyes, and only infused an extra tenderness into his tones as he answered, holding her close to him and speaking brightly and cheerily:

"Do, my own darling? Why, go back and be strong and true for me, as I will be for you. If you love me like that—Heaven bless you for it, sweet!—no one living can separate us; and though I promised the Professor we would not enter into any engagement before hearing from your parents, and even as things are I will not ask one pledge from you till I can do so under their roof, I engage myself to you now, and swear to be true to you and you only while life is in us. Be brave, my Vera. Don't look so unhappy, dear, or I shall blame myself more than your father blames me for having made you so. How long do you think it will be before I am in Brittany? Just twenty-four hours after you. And then if I have to go on my nose and knees to propitiate your parents I will."

"But if—if—," Vera was only partially comforted, "if they should not—"

"Why should you think of such 'ifs'? As they really know nothing of me they can have no personal objection to me as yet; and you tell me you do not know of any other. But even supposing the worst, it is but waiting a little. You are almost of age, as it is, and when it is a question of a woman's happiness or misery for life, she must judge for herself. Be sure of one thing, my dearest, if you trust your happiness to me you shall never regret it."

They were almost the last words spoken between them. The next moment the door-handle turned rather noisily, and

Mrs. Josephs entered, her wrinkled, sallow face eloquent with all motherly kindness and sympathy, to say that Vera must come to her dinner. It was waiting, and the Professor insisted on it.

There was very little said at that meal: a few disjointed words of regret or encouragement from the family party, and a repeated entreaty to Vera to eat—that was all. She herself never spoke a word; and though she tried meekly to obey, and put the food set before her in her mouth, the effort was evidently almost beyond her, and she seemed to derive her only strength from keeping her wistful eyes fixed on her lover, who waited on her himself, in silence too, but with tenderest assiduity. Leah did not appear. She was still upstairs, busy in helping—perhaps it might be truer to say hindering—Joanna in the work of packing Vera's clothes and other properties: an operation, however, which that experienced servant seemed determined to get through in good time under all difficulties.

The moment for starting came all too soon. Joanna insisted on going for a cab herself, saying that she had pre-engaged a particular one on the stand at the corner of the street; and had any of the family been looking out of the window they might have been surprised to see her return from there, not alone, but in company with a stout, well-dressed, foreign-looking gentleman, who, however, left her within two doors of the house and turned back. No one was thinking of Joanna, however, except to be glad of her absence. Those few minutes that elapsed between her going and returning, had been given to the lovers for their farewell, and when they were over Vera came out alone into the hall, where all the kindly household were assembled to bid her good-bye.

It was a very affectionate leave-taking. Good Mrs. Josephs had tears in her eyes, and the Professor kissed the girl's forehead as he bade her good-bye, adding cheerily and with the hope of bringing the colour into her pale cheeks, that he should be the first to call on a certain young doctor's wife in the good days to come; while David and John joined in an eager chorus of, "Come back soon, and pay us another visit, Vera. There'll be no one to tell us Breton fairy stories when you are gone."

But it was to her first friend after all that Vera clung at the end with sudden passionate tears and kisses; and it was Leah who said the last word to her, a

bright, tender word, spoken with a pale face but shining, steadfast eyes, the thought of which cheered the weeping maiden for long afterwards:

"Good-bye, darling, and remember I don't pity you a bit! Love that is worth anything is all the better for a few trials, and since you love one another everything is sure to come right for you in the end."

That was the last. The cab drove off. Vera's brief life in England had come to an end, and with it, as it seemed to her, all that made life worth living. She sat crouched together, her face hidden under the thick veil she had pulled over it, and never spoke or even attempted a reply to the rough but good-natured efforts at enlivening her which—now that she had got the girl in her power—Joanna, who was really attached to her, bestirred herself to make from time to time.

Vera did not even look up or rouse herself when they reached Southampton, but stood shivering and helpless beside her luggage on the platform while Joanna went for a cab; but when they were in it and driving to the docks, she lifted her head suddenly and asked:

"Joanna, who was that gentleman you spoke to at Waterloo, and who was on the platform here when we got out of the train?"

Joanna hesitated a moment, glancing at her as if uncertain what to answer, and then said brusquely:

"If you saw him, Vera, I should think you recognised him. It was the Count de Mailly."

"The Count here! But—if so, he knew I was with you. Why didn't he come and speak to me?"

"Well, I don't know, Vera," said Joanna crossly. "Frenchmen is that stiff in their ideas o' politeness, he might think you wouldn't care to be bothered with him when you was travelling alone with me. He come over on business, and he's going back by the same steamer as us, so we'll have him to look arter us in case o' need; and I don't doubt he'd be only too glad to come and talk to you if you like."

"Oh, no, no! I should hate it. I don't want to see him or anyone," cried Vera, bursting into sudden tears. "Please—please don't make me." And when they alighted she clung closely to the maid's arm, and kept her face more hidden than before till they were on board, and she could hasten to bury herself in the ladies' cabin. She did not see the Count again.

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